



What's Developing in Frederick

Frederick's Gastronomic Evolution | March 2016

Peel – downtown's crafter of Napoletana-inspired pizza – is not just another place to get a pie. In lieu of greasy to-go boxes, red-checked table cloths and wicker-wrapped Chianti bottles think contemporary cuisine, a thoughtful wine list and professional staff in a masterfully remodeled historic building.

And Peel is not the only exciting new eatery in town. After years of gastronomic drought in Frederick, the Savory Grille and Pub in the truck stop at I-25 and Hwy 52, along with a new in-house kitchen at Echo Brewing in Meadowlark Business Park are not just providing more local dining opportunities in interesting locations, they are contributing to something more important – a boutique, artisanal approach to food and entrepreneurship that is defining Frederick's culinary landscape.

Peel's elegantly simple menu opens with starter staples, such as stuffed mushrooms, bruschetta, and nicely dressed greens, and a more adventurous trio of locally-inspired meat and cheese plates and intriguing passion fruit and gorgonzola salad. Of course the headliner is Peel's selection of traditional wood-fired thin-crust pizzas, with interesting deviations from the norm including a decadent concoction of Tender Belly bacon, beer cheese and jalapeno sauce. Grilled paninis, such as the prosciutto with mozzarella and citrus caramelized onion on ciabatta, round out the daily offerings.

Ask Jason Hepp of Blackfox Realty (who also brought Santiago's and Georgia Boys Smokehouse to town) about his latest brainchild and he will tell you that Peel, which operates out of a heavily renovated version of the former Carbon Valley Coffee Roasters building, is much more than downtown Frederick's latest culinary addition.

"Peel is a culmination of our passions; taking care of others, preparing delicious food around which memories are made, elevating the craft of others, and embracing and cultivating all that is local – food and people alike," said Hepp of the family-owned-and-run labor of love. "It is our goal to inspire others to believe that with heart and hard work, they can realize passions of their own."

Peel's entrepreneurial team includes Hepp, his father John and his brother Patrick. His cousin Keven, a wine

connoisseur and pizza dough expert, collaborates with Executive Chef Josh Jacobsen and wine consultant Sheila Carey to develop evolved flavor profiles and libation pairings. Core managers Tonya and Brian also bring a wealth of experience to the team. "We have all come together lending our expertise and passions to make Peel possible," said Hepp. Hepp put his craftsmanship to work to make way for Peel, acquiring the former Carbon Valley Coffee Roasters site in downtown Frederick and adding about 565 square feet through a complete remodel. Despite the overhaul, Hepp was able to preserve the historic feel of the 58 year-old structure. "One of our goals during the construction was for the building to feel its age after all of its new improvements. This was important because we wanted to preserve the authentic feel of this great downtown community. To do this we found creative ways to reuse materials," said Hepp.

Hepp designed Peel's bar and table tops out of reclaimed flooring from an old bowling alley. "If you look close enough you can still see the pin decks and the guide dots," he said. The dining room's west wall and the bench east of the bar were crafted using fir wood planks salvaged during the demolition of the historic grocery store that stood for a century next door to the Peel site.

Hepp was also able to reuse materials he rescued in Denver, including bar stools from Union Station, and rare 3-inch by 13-inch beams from an old industrial building. "We are truly grateful for the excellent help we received and for the opportunity to preserve history while adding to it in downtown Frederick."

Across the interstate at the southwest corner of Hwy 52 and I-25, Steve Spelts was also diligently working throughout 2015 to remodel what used to be Pepper Jack's restaurant. The project began with a complete demolition of the restaurant portion of the truck-stop followed by a total redesign. "The place has been completely reworked,"

Spelts said. The freshly renovated truck stop owned by Spelts now hosts the Savory Grille and Pub, an upscale take on traditional diner fare.

"There are about 7 million



cars a month on I-25,” Spelts said of Savory’s prime location on the high-traffic intersection between the interstate and Highway 52. “I think we’ll be ok.”

The new eatery is run by Executive Chef Tommy Harder, a graduate of the Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts and Executive Chef at the Blind Tiger Alehouse in New York City. Savory’s contemporary-Americana concept will contribute yet another upscale option for locals, while still providing the traditional comfort food expected from highway service centers like Spelts’.

“It’s a different kind of menu,” said Spelts. “It will always be in a dynamic state of change.” He sees the menu evolving as popular daily specials find their way into a semi-permanent lineup.

On the inaugural menu, roadhouse classics such as country fried steak and chicken and waffles are elevated with gourmet touches, including mushroom gravy, duck-fat hash-browns and bourbon maple syrup. Cut-above breakfasts like shrimp and grits with Tasso ham, smoked tomatoes and poached eggs, are now options in town. In addition to charbroiled burgers and steaks, lunch and dinner guests can try a bison green chile meatloaf sandwich with bacon and guacamole, and grilled pork flat iron over cheesy grits with an ancho chili balsamic drizzle. To whet the whistle, there is a top-shelf bar, wine list and craft beers on tap.

Desert options range in elaborateness from the customary ‘cheesecake with berry compote,’ to the subtly updated mascarpone-frosted carrot cake, to the over-the-top bourbon bacon chocolate brownie with salted caramel ice cream. Echo Brewery was also busy remodeling in 2015 to add food offerings to their craft beer lineup this year. Located in the Meadowlark Business Park on Iris Pkwy off Colorado Blvd, Echo is still serving the craft beers that have made them popular in these parts, but in addition to the regular food trucks that patrons have come to expect, local brewmasters Dennis and Daniel Richards are now serving light fare out of their own recently constructed in-house kitchen.

“While we are passionate about both craft beer and artisan pizza, we decided to differentiate our menu in Frederick from our menu in Erie,” said Dennis Richards of their desire to make the Frederick experience unique.

Out-of-the-ordinary starters such as charred shishito peppers pair nicely with tried-and-true staples like chips, salsa and queso or nachos, while the Bavarian soft pretzels and Spring Creek salad with cranberries, walnuts, gorgonzola and honey balsamic dressing cool the palette in between spicy bites. Those with a sweet tooth can opt

for the crème brulee cheesecake with oatmeal crust and caramel drizzle, and at the bar Echo complements its beer selection with ciders and wines from guest producers.

However, the star of Echo’s new menu is its assortment of specialty tacos, which includes the signature Asian short rib with siracha, Filipino chicken adobo with cabbage, beer-braised carnitas with chipotle sauce and buffalo chicken with traditional hot wing glaze and blue cheese dressing.

“I have been a fan of tacos for many years and they pair great with our tap room environment. I had a Korean short rib taco in Florida once that was absolutely delicious,” said Richards of one of his inspirations for the Frederick menu. “I ate those tacos every day I was visiting! Fusion style tacos are a delight.”

According to Richards, Echo will also be offering regular specials, including different tacos every week or two. “This week, it is a Thai peanut chicken taco and they have been going quick. Just like brewing beer, the sky is the limit as far as flavors go for these tacos,” he said. “While we will always have our standard menu, we plan to do specials like Tamale Tuesdays, or a pizza night or some other type of food on different days. We are beyond excited to share our passion for food with this community.”

Frederick does not yet have a “restaurant row” of iconic chow-houses such as Olive Garden, Chili’s and Applebee’s, the kind of establishments standard for working and middle-class family dining. But with the addition of locally-owned independent restaurants such as Peel, Savory Grille and Pub, Echo Brewing, and Georgia Boys Smokehouse before them, perhaps something better is on the horizon: something built on the efforts and passions of people that are invested in the community and dedicated to true craftsmanship.

So what’s next, more delectable diners, beguiling brasseries and conscientious cafes? According to Jason Hepp, it might be a good bet.

“We have many plans as we are passionate about continuing to serve this great community and to help with the revitalization of this great downtown,” said Hepp. “We just have to keep listening to what people want, narrow them [options] down and try to keep the ball rolling. None of this would be possible without the help of so many great local people.”



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